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ABSTRACT

Since the former East German Communist State--the German Democratic Republic (GDR)--was incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany, the federal constitution has been valid throughout the whole of Germany, guaranteeing press freedom and ending press censorship in eastern Germany. In October 1989, the GDR had 39 daily newspapers (many published by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), 31 weekly papers and illustrated magazines, over 500 technical and specialized periodicals, and over 600 church papers and factory newspapers. A system of guidance and control by the SED rendered direct censorship unnecessary since, as a matter of course, the press published only what was acceptable to the SED. The period between October 1989 and October 1990 is seen in retrospect to have been a time of great experimentation and freedom for the press. Less than 2 years after the democratic transformation of the GDR, the structural shape of the West German press has become entrenched in most parts of the five new federal states: there are only a few supra-regional newspapers; the regional press has established a strong position; there is virtually no party press; and the press has become "concentrated" as mergers between publishing chains continue and as competition forces some newspapers and periodicals out of business. The large West German publishing concerns are likely to gain the edge on the market in eastern Germany. At the same time, foreign multi-media concerns have gained a foothold in the new federal states. This increasing globalization of the mass media (especially regarding former communist states) is of concern and interest to media students. (One table of data is included.) (RS)

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"U P D A T E O N G E R M A N Y"

Now eastern Germany gets a free press

- Foreign media concerns and western German publishers are active in the new federal states -

By Hermann Meyn

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Berlin (INP) -- Since the former East German Communist State - the German Democratic Republic (GDR) - was incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany on 3rd October 1990, Basic Law (the federal constitution) has been valid throughout the whole of Germany. Among other things, this guarantees press freedom, so that there is no longer censorship in eastern Germany. The subsidised party press has made way for mass media organised on the basis of free enterprise. Most of the new owners of the press there are major western German publishing concerns. Just how revolutionary the changes are that have taken place in the press sector there is made evident by looking at the situation prior to the political events in the GDR in October/November 1989.

At that time, the GDR had 39 daily newspapers with a total daily circulation of more than nine million copies. Of these, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) published the party's central mouthpiece, "Neues Deutschland" (ND), 14 district newspapers and the "Berliner Zeitung" and "BZ am Abend", the latter two issued by the party-owned publishing house Berliner Verlag. While the SED papers and the central organs of the mass organisations (the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth) organisation's "Junge Welt" and the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund's (Free German Trade Union Federation) "Tribüne") boasted circulations totalling several million, the paper shortage meant that not much was left over for the organs published by the so-called "block" parties, the eastern CDU, the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD), the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) and the Democratic Farmworkers' Party of Germany (DBD). The choice offered to the East German public also included a further 31 weekly papers and illustrated magazines, among them "FF dabei" and the "Neue Berliner Illustrierte" as well as technical and specialised periodicals (more than 500 titles), church papers and factory newspapers (more than 600 titles).

While loyalty to the SED was mandatory for the press, it was possible at times for papers to voice criticism, particularly by way of their local news pages. This was criticism in the form of complaints about the bureaucratic behaviour of local authorities, poor service in restaurants and department stores and excessively long waits for repair work to be carried out.

(1)

Pre-democracy tutelage and control

Direct censorship was practised in the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany only in the years immediately after the Second World War; later, a system of guidance and control rendered censorship unnecessary so that, as a matter of course, the press published only what was acceptable to the ruling SED. Günter Schabowski, a Politbureau member who continued for several weeks after the downfall of the regime to hold responsibility for organising press work in the Central Committee, described how this functioned: "Every Thursday after the Politbureau meeting (Tuesdays) and following consultations within the Central Committee Secretariat (Wednesday), the editors-in-chief of the Berlin-based newspapers of the SED and the mass organisations got together at meetings. The head of the Government Press Office's Agitation Department was also present at these political (Ed.: brainwashing) sessions when editors were issued with political instructions for propagation of party decisions, current domestic and foreign political reporting and comment. On the given day, immediately after being issued with the Central Committee's "guidelines", the head of the Press Office would summon the chiefs of "block" newspapers and, in a no less authoritative manner, issue them with the "guidelines" which, via his person, were by then government "recommendations". The editorial departments of the district newspapers were informed of agitation decrees by telex. This medium was also employed to communicate "do's and don'ts" to editors on a day-to-day basis. Those based in Berlin were told by telephone up until the moment before the printing presses started rolling of news that must be used or, depending on the tactical discretion of the staff of the Central Committee department, either had to be given front-page prominence or placed inconspicuously in the inside pages". (Günter Schabowski: Der Absturz. Berlin 1991, P. 91)

Examples of forbidden formulations and topics were noted by Dieter Langguth, veteran Editor-in-Chief of the FDJ organ "Junge Welt" and deputy head of the Agitation Department of the SED Central Committee from 1984 to 1989:

- no baskets of fruit on conference tables to be photographed (the public may become envious, because fruit was a luxury)
- no mention of sausage kiosks (people ate enough meat as it was)
- no mention of atomic power plants (otherwise a sensitive issue would attract unwanted publicity)
- no mention of home-made flying machines (people might get the idea of fleeing).

The press between democratic change and accession

Following the opening-up of the frontiers, West German publishers wasted no time in seeking to establish themselves publicistically in the GDR. Several major publishing concerns divided the GDR up among themselves for the distribution of their papers. "Yellow press" products such as "Bild" found a voracious market. Smaller West German publishers offered their products in regions close to the border. At the same time, West German publishers scoured the GDR for partners. Citizens' campaign committes and other popular movements set up their own newspapers. For many journalists today, this period of transition, seen in retrospect, was a time of great freedom and experimentation. They had been released from the stranglehold of the SED and the Block parties and the new owners had not yet arrived on the scene. But already, there were indications that the established central organs of parties and mass organisations were in for a hard time surviving in the face of the new competition.

The present situation of daily newspapers

Today, not even two years after the democratic transformation in the GDR, the structural shape of the West German press has become entrenched in most parts of the five new federal states, i.e.:

- only few supra-regional newspapers
- the regional press has established a strong position
- virtually no party press
- press "concentration".

(3)

West German publishers' hopes of finding a wide readership in the one-time GDR for prestigious and journalistically more sophisticated newspapers such as the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung". the "Süddeutsche Zeitung", "Die Welt" or the "Frankfurter Rundschau" have not been fulfilled. Like weeklies such as "Die Zeit" and the "Deutsche Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt" or the news magazine "Der Spiegel", they have been able to increase their circulation only slightly. Considering the economic situation of most of the population between the Baltic Sea and the Erz Mountains, these papers are regarded as simply too expensive. Added to this is the difficulty of adapting to new reading habits. For years, people in the GDR had been accustomed to reading their papers from beginning to end, thin though they were and saturated with Communist party jargon. The flood of information contained in West German newspapers compels people now to be more selective in their reading, and this takes some getting used to.

West German publishers of street-sale newspapers have gained much more positive experience. Initially, "Bild" sold around a million copies a day in the ex-GDR. But the circulation slumped by about half by the middle of 1991 following the appearance on the news-stands in eastern Germany of a competitor to "Bild" -- "Super!-Zeitung". This mass-circulation paper, specially designed for the East Germans, is circulated jointly by the West German magazine publisher Hubert Burda and the Australo-American multi-media publisher Rupert Murdoch.

Apart from "Bild" and "Super", there are other papers competing for the favour of eastern German readers: the "Morgenpost" (in Dresden, Chemnitz and Mecklenburg) produced by the Hamburg magazine publishers Gruner+Jahr, the "Mitteldeutsche Express" (Halle) from the DuMont Schauberg newspaper concern in Cologne and the "Berliner Kurier am Morgen" and the "Berliner Kurier am Abend" published by the Berliner Verlag, acquired by Gruner+Jahr in cooperation with the British publisher Robert Maxwell.

For several decades, the SED press played a dominant role in the districts of the GDR. It was to these regional newspapers, many of them with more than a dozen regional editions, that West German publishing houses turned their particular attention in

the wake of democratisation in 1989. Before concluding cooperation deals with former SED publishers, they re-named newspapers in many cases. The old "Freiheit" (liberty) in Halle is now the "Mitteldeutsche Zeitung", the "Märkische Volksstimme" (voice of the people) in Potsdam was re-named the "Märkische Allgemeine". To start with, West German partner-publishers were confronted with the task of technical modernisation in old district papers jettisoned by the SED. They provided them with editorial systems for the electronic processing of news and articles, more efficient printing presses capable of producing more pages and a new distribution system. They also launched the advertisement branch.

Following the fly-by-night action of mainly the big West German publishers in staking their interest in regional newspapers east of the Elbe, surprises were inevitable when the official agency responsible for privatisation stepped in to decide who could purchase what. In the first move, the Hamburg magazine publisher Gruner+Jahr and the British media tycoon Robert Maxwell acquired the Berliner Verlag which, aside from innumerable journals and two mass-circulation papers, also produces the "Berliner Zeitung" (circulation: more than 300,000). The following table shows how the public utility holding company, the "Treuhandanstalt", decided in detail:

Regions	Newspaper	Circulation	Planned new owner
Mecklenburg-West Pommerania Rostock	Ostsee-Zeitung	284,000	Lübecker Nachrichten (Springer participation)
Schwerin	Volkszeitung	190,000	Burda GmbH
Neubrandenburg	Nordkurier	185,000	Kieler Nachrichten/Augsburger Allgemeine/ Schwäbische Zeitung
Brandenburg Cottbus	Lausitzer Rundschau	215,000	Saarbrücker Zeitung (Holtzbrinck)

Frankfurt/Oder	Märkische Oderzeitung	185,000	Südwest-Presse Ulm
Potsdam	Märkische Allgemeine	280,000	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Sachsen-Anhalt			
Halle	Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	530,000	DuMont Schauberg, Cologne
Magdeburg	Volksstimme	440,000	Bauer-Verlag
Sachsen			
Leipzig	Volkszeitung	400,000	Madsack/Springer each 50 percent
Chemnitz	Freie Presse	607,000	Medien-Union Ludwigshafen
Dresden	Sächsische Zeitung	527,000	Gruner+Jahr 51 percent Rheinische Post/ Westdeutsche Zeitung 49 percent
Thueringen			
Erfurt	Thüringische Allgemeine	370,000	Westdeutsche Allgemeine (coop.)
Gera	Ostthüringische Nachrichten	207,000	Westdeutsche Allgemeine (coop.)
Suhl	Freies Wort	160,000	Coburger Neue Presse (70 percent Süddeutsche Zeitung, 30 percent SPD)

As the table shows, it was mainly the large West German publishers that prevailed. It has not yet been decided whether the "Westdeutsche Allgemeine" of Essen, the biggest subscription newspaper in the Federal Republic of Germany, will be permitted to acquire the "Thüringische Allgemeine" (Erfurt) and the "Ostthüringer Nachrichten" (Gera). The Treuhandanstalt has stuck to its principle of allowing only one regional newspaper in the new federal states to pass into the hands of a West German aspiring owner. For this reason, for example, the Bauer-Verlag of Hamburg - which has been cooperating with eastern German publishing houses for the past year - was forced to abandon its cooperation ventures in Neubrandenburg and Schwerin. The Treuhandanstalt says that, apart from the principle of guaranteeing variety, a part is played in this not only by the purchase price but also investment commitments.

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Critics of decisions taken by the agency say it is regrettable that it allows the big publishing concerns in western Germany to expand even more and obtain a regional monopoly of the press market in eastern Germany. To this, it must be answered that the ideal solution - i.e. acquisition of publishing houses by "native" entrepreneurs in the region - cannot be realised, because no such enterprise existed there. Furthermore, smaller western German publishers would also probably not have possessed the necessary resources to purchase and carry out urgently required technical modernisation. The total purchase price for all papers in question is 850 million DM, with investment pledges running to 1,300 million DM.

Even before the Treuhandanstalt's decisions were made known, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) laid claim to many regional papers in eastern Germany which had belonged to the party during the Weimar Republic, but were confiscated by the Nazis and then, in the aftermath of the forced amalgamation of SPD and KPD in 1946, handed to the SED in the then Soviet Zone of Occupation. Now, the Social Democrats want minority participations in these newspapers taken over by West German publishers. Alternatively, they are demanding compensation. The legal dispute is still in progress.

After 40 years of party indoctrination, it is more than understandable that the population in eastern Germany is not very interested in political party newspapers. The circulation of the SED central organ "Neues Deutschland", which now represents the policies of the successor-party, the PDS, has plunged from more than one million to less than 200,000. The Springer concern, which bought the central organ of the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany, the "Morgen", closed the newspaper down in 1991. Despite the praise heaped on this newspaper for its liberal-democratic stance and the fact that several of its reporters had won coveted press awards, the Springer-Verlag decided against propping the paper up after having claimed already to have invested 20 million DM in it. The experts give little prospect of survival, too, to the former central and regional organs of the other "block" parties taken over by western German firms.

(7)

After a brief heyday which brought the founding of a series of newspapers in eastern Germany, the wave of mergers has reached the press market there now too. Newspapers run by the popular action movements such as the "Leipziger Andere Zeitung" and the "Statt Zeitung" in Halle have vanished from the scene. Eastern editions of western products have also been short-lived - examples being the "Altmärker Allgemeine", a local edition of the "Aller Zeitung" in Gifhorn, the "Anhalter Anzeiger" in Dessau, the "Magdeburger Allgemeine", an offshoot of the "Hannoversche Allgemeine" of Hanover, the "Mecklenburgische Volkszeitung" in Rostock, which appeared under the aegis of the Bielefeld "Neue Westfälische", and "Die Neue" in Suhl co-founded with the cooperation of the Würzburg newspaper "Main-Post".

Many observers think the process of concentration will persist. For one thing, hundreds of thousands of unemployed East Germans will not be able to afford more than one newspaper. Furthermore, present economic developments do not allow scope for an expanding advertisement trade in the foreseeable future. Both trends reduce the survivability of down-market newspapers.

Situation of periodicals

In much the same way as in the newspaper sector, West German periodicals producers began offering their products for sale in the GDR in March 1990. It has since become clear that the eastern Germans make very widely varied use of the range on offer. Generally speaking, western German women's and youth magazines as well as radio and television programme magazines attain the highest sales in the new federal states - particularly the more inexpensive titles, whereas the "classic" illustrated weeklies such as "Stern" or "Quick" are too costly and are left lying on the shelf. The Germans of the former GDR are likely to spend 5 DM on a magazine only if it offers tangible benefits - an example being the "Selbermachen" do-it-yourself magazine.

A comparison of the sales of periodicals in the first quarter of 1990 (prior to distribution in eastern Germany) with the figures of one year later (including sales to the new federal states) draws particular attention to sales expansion for two juvenile

publications - "Micky Maus" and "Coupé". Both doubled their sales within 12 months and are now selling 671,000 and 612,000 respectively. There was an even bigger rise in sales for the youth periodical "Bravo", from 500,000 to one-and-a-half million.

The western German Burda-Verlag launched two publications designed specifically for readers in eastern Germany - "Super-Illu" and "Super-TV". Both are sales hits. At the same time, the outwardly more colorful and internally more sophisticated western German competition has forced a number of former GDR periodicals out of business. When the circulation of "Für Dich" - produced by the Berliner Verlag - dropped to a tenth within the space of one year, (latterly 110,000), its new proprietors Gruner+Jahr and Maxwell closed it down. "Horizont" suffered the same fate. The Hamburg magazine publishers gave a new title ("Extra-Magazin") to the former "Neue Berliner Illustrierte"; they also remodelled it in the hope that it will hold its own in the market.

Conclusions

The developing eastern German press market is exerting an influence on western German newspaper and periodicals publishing houses. Periodicals multis such as the Hamburg Bauer-Verlag or the Offenburg/Munich Burda-Verlag have now begun producing newspapers, too, in some cases newly-founded. Generally speaking, it's the large publishing concerns that are more likely to gain the edge on the market in eastern Germany; this certainly depends to some extent on the major investments needed to modernise antiquated production facilities. At the same time, foreign multi-media concerns in the shape of Murdoch and Maxwell have gained a foothold in the new federal states. Overall, the contours of a newspaper and periodicals landscape very similar to that existing between Lake Konstanz and the North Sea with some exceptions is beginning to take shape.

(IN-Press)

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